

Protecting Childhood - Looking Ahead
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I was in South Africa just before Easter, and in the mood of that festival I was filled with thoughts about the cocoon phase of life. It seemed humanity was in one, and that means old forms dissolving away and a time of uncertainty while one waits for the new wings to sprout. A very enthusiastic and active Waldorf teacher kept speaking of the future in such glowing terms that I found myself getting annoyed. Why should that bother me, I wondered. Finally I realized: I was identifying with the time of loss and dissolving in the cocoon; he was identifying with the future when the butterfly would be born. Since then I have tried to stretch myself to include both pictures.

Just when it seemed that the public was totally disinterested in the plight of children today, a new wave of interest has arisen. Meetings have been held in the White House about young children and their need for healthy, human interaction; major articles have appeared in Time magazine and a special issue of Newsweek focused on the child from birth to three. On ABC television a special with Tom Hanks and other stars conveyed the message that children under three needs lots of love and hugs, and they need to hear real human voices talking to them, telling them stories, reading them books and singing them songs. Researchers now say that television and tapes are no substitute for the life-filled quality of the real human voice. Most of this is not new, although it's lovely to hear people stressing the importance of the live human voice. What is especially new is that so much interest is being paid to the youngest of children. Our challenge now is how to work with this new wave of interest and energy and build upon it for the sake of the children.

In this issue we have included some articles that spell out the problems of hyperactivity and related issues more clearly. Informing ourselves of the problems is an important step towards helping to resolve them. At the next level there are two directions that can be explored. One is to create an organization that can form alliances with other like-minded organizations to work for the protection of childhood. It should not be a Waldorf organization per se but a coalition building organization where all can meet openly and honestly.

The other direction is to take the work we are already doing in our Waldorf communities and enlarge it so that it becomes a healing impulse for all children. Some areas ripe for development are the puppetry work and story telling that is so much a part of Waldorf education. There is also a growing concern about media, and this is the right moment to renew our activity for protecting young children from its harmful influence. It is also a time to focus on children in the first three years and the need for day care for them and for all young children whose parents are away from home.

These are some of the areas we are covering in this issue of the Newsletter. We hope that the Newsletter can continue to serve our own early childhood work but that it will also become a vehicle for expressing concern over the plight of children today and the many things which can be done to help them and their families.